

Little Science Experiment by **coneygoil**

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Summary:

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Hopper's mission was to save Will, and he was determined to do anything to return that boy into his mother's arms. He didn't know Eleven from a hill of beans. He only knew her as the child he'd mistaken as Will, the child on Hawkins' Lab most wanted list. When he finally encountered her, she was a means to an end; a way to get Will back. He didn't care about her, didn't have time to get to know her, or even want to know her, as anything but a bargaining chip.

As Hopper sits across the table from the same girl he sold out, his heart overflows, but guilt also burns his soul. She's not the little science experiment anymore; she's a real girl with thoughts and opinions, hopes and dreams. She's not the girl with a number for a name branded on her arm. She's El, the curly-top with the soft voice and doe eyes.

El's lips curve into that little smile of hers when she notices he's gazing at her. "What?"

Hopper just shakes his head, and El goes back to finishing off her Eggos. He's never known anyone to love a particular food item this much, but that weird obsession with Eggos is just one of the things that makes El who she is. And he knows her so well now.

She's curious. The world is an open book to her. Though she is an individual of few words, she soaks up words and definitions like a sponge. When he's teaching her a new task, she listens intently, focused on his instruction.

Her devotion to Mike Wheeler is one to be marveled at. While he was still hiding her in secret, she'd visit Mike through the void. She denied she'd visited the Wheeler boy nearly every single night, but Hopper knew better. On some nights, he'd stand by her bedroom door, eyes closed tightly shut, listening to her soft cries wishing he could wrap his arms around her and take away the hurt.

But those days are behind them now. There's still hurt and always

will be, but they both have the support of others who love them, people they trust and that makes hiding away for another whole year easier.

“El, I gotta ask you something.” El raises her eyes, curiosity reflecting back at him. “Me and you, we’re a family now.” –a broken, wounded family. He steels himself for what he’s about to ask. He has no foresight as to her reaction. “I can be your dad, and you can be my little girl.”

El cocks her head, the concern in her voice breaking his heart all over again. “What about Sara?”

A small part of him asked the same question. What a Sara? She was his only child, and he would have died in her place if he’d had the chose. In a way, he felt as if he were betraying her with a new child and it took some heart-searching to place that guilt aside. Sara was gone, and El needed a father. This was his second chance.

“A dad isn’t limited to having one kid. Sara will always be my little girl, and you can too.”

El nods. “You’re not like Papa.”

It burns him to hear her mention that sick bastard. He’d do anything to repair the damage that sociopath did to her. “And I never will be, kid.” He gives the most important word in the world to her. “Promise.”

El takes a deep breath, her eyes searching the depths of his. A long beat passes before she smiles. “You can be my dad, and I’ll be your little girl.”

Hopper lets out a tiny relieved chuckle. “Good.” He reaches behind him, pulling out an envelope and sliding it across the table. “Because it’s official.”

El opens the envelope, her eyes widening at the paper she pulls out. She looks up, a bright smile shining back at him and he wonders once again how he could have ever called her a little science experiment. She’s his little girl, and he’d spend the rest of his life living up to the

promise to be the dad she needed.